



ALL-STATE® LEGAL 800-222-0510 EDH11 RECYCLED

Copyright 1999 Federal News Service, Inc.
Federal News Service

MARCH 25, 1999, THURSDAY

SECTION: IN THE NEWS

LENGTH: 1210 words

HEADLINE: PREPARED STATEMENT OF
HASAN ABDEL RAHMAN
CHIEF REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PLO AND THE PNA
TO THE UNITED STATES
BEFORE THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FOREIGN OPERATIONS

BODY:

Mr. Chairman,

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to appear before this distinguished committee of the United States Senate. The Palestinian people admire the American democracy and its fine institutions and hope to learn from them as we build our own political and economic systems. Both the **Palestinian Authority** and its public are very grateful for the leading role of the United States in the march for a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Allow me, Mr. Chairman, in these opening remarks to make a few important points about our policy toward peace in the Middle East and about our bilateral relations with the United States.

First, our decisions to seek a peaceful settlement with Israel and to reject violence as a means to political ends are final and irreversible. The Oslo Accords created an opportunity for mutual acceptance and coexistence that we intend to exploit until a full and permanent peace prevails between us. Israelis and Palestinians are fated to be neighbors forever, and we must both prepare our children for a life of peace, acceptance and mutual respect. We will not go back on this decision.

Second, our fight with terrorism is strategic and unending. We do not fight terrorism merely because it threatens other states, including Israel, but because terrorism threatens our own society and the kind of democratic institutions we intend to build. Our fight with terrorism is not contingent; it is an unending commitment. On this issue our interests and those of our neighbors are identical.

Third, the peace process has opened up common interests that are bigger than the differences. Today, there is a new division: Palestinians and Israelis united for peace challenging Palestinian and Israeli opponents of peace. To be sure, we have some serious differences with Israel and many important issues of contention in our arduous negotiations. But our aim is to resolve these issues through peaceful negotiations, knowing very well that majorities of Israelis and Palestinians remain solidly behind peace, even in the midst of crises.

Fourth, we consider our growing bilateral relations with the United States as a cornerstone of our peace policy. The United States has been an indispensable leader in every successful peace effort between Israel and its neighbors, and has been crucial in implementing the Oslo agreements and securing the Wye River Memorandum. The growing coordination and cooperation between us have led to an increasing level of mutual trust that has enabled the **Palestinian Authority** to take risks for peace even in the face of public skepticism. The stronger this relationship, the higher the prospects of peace.

Fifth, our bilateral relations with the United States are important for our efforts to build the kind of political, educational, economic and legal systems that our people desire and deserve. The Palestinian people admire the American democracy and the economy of free trade. Certainly, we have traditions and social institutions that we value and must take into account in constructing our system, but we have much to learn from the United States. The educational, economic and legal cooperation efforts increase the levels of expertise among our people and open our horizons to new, more successful ways. The stronger these efforts of cooperation, the better our chance at building modern accountable institutions. The stronger our democracy and our system of free trade, the better for the cause of a lasting peace.

Sixth, we do not view our relations with the U.S. as being competitive with anyone else. On the contrary, we view them as reinforcing U.S. relations with other partners in the peace process, since our interests in peace are mutual. In the same way that both U.S.-Egyptian relations and U.S.-Israeli relations were enhanced by their own peace, we believe that Palestinian-U.S.-Israeli relations would be similarly enhanced.

Mr. Chairman,

I am not here to score points or to point fingers about the current difficulties in the peace process. The **Palestinian Authority** is guided by the principles that I have outlined in its determination to see the Oslo Accords and the Wye River agreements implemented, and we believe we have complied with the terms of these agreements under very difficult circumstances.

I would be less than candid if I state to you today that we have so far been fully successful every step of the way in meeting the aspirations of our people and in implementing our agenda. Some of our failures have been honest mistakes of a people building new institutions under difficult circumstances. Some have to do with the absence of special skills and resources. But we ask our friends in Congress not to underestimate our external and internal dilemmas. Yes, we have neither a full democracy nor a fully modern free market economy yet. We recognize the shortcomings of our media and educational materials, among others.

But consider this: We have no full control over our lives. Five years after our peace agreements with Israel, our impoverished people are still clustered in small and non-contiguous patches of land, separated by Israeli soldiers, and our access to the outside world remains out of our hands. No free economy can flourish in this environment.

We find ourselves at this delicate stage of the peace process having to address public skepticism, in the absence of a visible economic dividend, while having to fight our big enemy, terrorism. The resources and energies that are necessary for this effort have undermined our ability to spend on other important projects. Because the fight with terrorism is often harsh, our people fear that democracy is undermined. It is in this spirit that we recognize that ultimate progress in such arenas as the media and education must take place not through centralized decrees and police actions, but by engaging the specialists and the public and beginning a constructive dialogue. Because of the tough action we take on terrorism, we must especially be careful in other arenas -- lest we lose not only the confidence of our public, but also the opportunity to build the democracy we need.

Mr. Chairman,

We do not expect our friends in Congress to refrain from constructive criticism where appropriate; we must improve. We do not ask Congress to choose between us and other friends of the United States, since our interests are mutual. We do ask for fairness, for recognition of the pain of our people, and of the progress that we have made under strenuous circumstances. We have witnessed much criticism from this great institution of the American people, but little encouragement or acknowledgement of our efforts. To this date, even as we have become partners in peace, Congressional legislation treats us as terrorists. The aspirations of the Palestinian people are modest: an opportunity to determine their own future on their own land. We dream of our children having normal peaceful lives competing with their neighbors not over guns, but over computer skills and productivity. We believe that the United States is indispensable in securing this dream. We hope that the U.S. Senate will be a fair and constructive partner in our peaceful march.

Thank you.

END

LOAD-DATE: March 27, 1999